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ABSTRACT

This bibliography offers an historical perspective on imaginary play companions with 48 entries dating from 1891 to 1975. Entries, which include journal articles, monographs, and books, draw heavily from child development literature. A list of 10 titles from general literature related to the subject of imaginary companions is also included. The abstracts vary widely in length, ranging from 50 to 500 words. (JMB)

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IMAGINARY PLAY COMPANION:

ANNOTATED ABSTRACT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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IMAGINARY PLAY COMPANIONS:

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (1890-1975)

Ames, L. B. and J. Learned. 1946. Imaginary companions and related phenomena. Journal of Genetic Psychology 69: 147-167.

This paper presents data with regard to imaginary companions and other imaginative phenomena observed in 210 children of nursery school age who attended the Guidance Nursery at the Yale Clinic of Child Development or who were examined as part of the guidance service. Thirty children, or about 14 percent, had imaginary companions (human). Nineteen girls and 11 boys exhibited this phenomenan. The strongest period for this to occur is from 36-42 months, peaking at 42 months. The playmate usually drops out, rather gradually, around 54 months, if not before. The majority of children had playmates of both sexes (does not agree with earlier findings that the playmate is same sex as the child). The largest number (16) have same-age imaginary companions; 10 have companions older than themselves. Ames and Learned say that a clear developmental trend suggests itself in this respect. "It appears that the very youngest children to have imaginary human companions have companions older than themselves. Later they have contemporaries. Still later they have babies or children younger than themselves" (p. 155).

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The average age for each of these groups was 30-33 months, 42 months, and 42-48 months, respectively. The largest number of children (11) had one companion only. The majority of companions appeared spontaneously, while most of the others came from real people. Most of the imaginary companions had ordinary names. In the vast majority of cases, the companion served the purpose of general companionship and play, although many other purposes are also cited. The researchers found a marked variety from child to child as to the characteristics of companions, and the duration of the companions was also variable. They also found "that not only are children who are highly intelligent, highly verbal, and of a generally 'imaginative' nature, most likely to experience imaginary playmates... but that the specific personality type of the child seems to determine which particular kind of imaginative phenomena he will experience" (p. 161). "We do not find that there is one general type which experiences all these phenomena. ...We definitely do not find imaginary companions only in timid or lonely children or in those exhibiting personality difficulties. ...thus the imaginary companion...is here considered as merely one part of a total 'imagination gradient', any or all parts of which may quite normally occur in any one child. ...the appearance of imaginary companions and related phenomena occurs in

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many...as a natural developmental phenomenon, characteristic of the age period from 2½ to 4½ years, and perhaps persisting secretly considerably past that age" (p. 166).

Arlitt, A. H. 1928. Psychology of infancy and early childhood. New York: McGraw-Hill.

"Children often play with imaginary playmates. With these they seem to be able to play dramatic games and to enjoy other activities. Such...playmates may be played with for a period of a year or more. They appear to drop out of the child's play life as he matures" (p. 254).

Bach, S. 1971. Notes on some imaginary companions. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 26: 159-171.

In this paper, Bach reports three case studies of imaginary companions. The first, Doodoo, was invented by two toddlers, briefly flourished, and eventually was completely forgotten. He says, "The subsequent development of the children suggested that this had been a normal developmental fantasy used to cope with certain difficulties of the anal stage, and that it had some special relationship to the formation of gender identity" (p. 159). The two other case studies, however, involve two adult female patients who retained vivid memories of their childhood imaginary companions. Of these, Bach relates, "where a distinctly deviant development had brought the women to analysis, the companion had been neither forgotten nor

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internalized, and it proved to be the focal point of problems with accepting the feminine identity" (p. 159-160). Bach presents these two clinical studies as 'Robin: An Imaginary Alter Ego,' and as 'Crumber: An Imaginary Male Twin.' He states: "In both normal and pathological development the fantasy companion appeared as an element in the displacement series of nipple-feces-penis-child, and its survival or disappearance seemed related to how successfully this series was integrated. ...thus, in the two analyzed cases, one of the major problems for these women was how to be actively feminine. Because unresolved conflicts with the preoedipal mother had been displaced onto the father, they experienced unusual difficulties in solving the odeipus complex with the father and in accepting the feminine identity. These issues presented themselves on one level as a conflict around the fantasy of introjecting the paternal phallus. In both cases the imaginary companion came to represent an envied and idealized phallus, and was used defensively to perpetuate a regressive, narcissistic solution of the oedipus conflict" (p. 160). Bach goes on to suggest that in the case of Doodoo, the developmental purpose of the fantasy was fulfilled, and therefore the companion was forgotten. But in the cases of Robin and Crumber the process was not as successful, "and consequently the existence of the

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companion can be taken as an indication of maturational lag. ...in each instance the companion appears in response to a narcissistic blow, the main ingredient of which is a loss of omnipotent control over reality... . In fact, one of the most striking similarities of these three companions is that for each child they represented some vital aspect of mastery or competence, a core element of the active, spontaneous self" (p. 169). Referring to Doodoo, the imaginary companion of the 2 and 3 year, 4 month pre-schoolers; Bach adds that this type of imaginary companion may be considered "a kind of transitional phenomenon, for it becomes implicated in the displacement series of nipple-feces-penis-child, and should tend to disappear with the successful integration of this series through the internal-ization of the superego and the sexual role." He further states that as the imaginary companion becomes a perfect ego ideal, it is at this point "that the need for him dis-appears: he becomes structuralized, as it were, and is covered by the infantile amnesia" (p. 170). In his article, Bach cites the work of Nagera and Sperling, among others.

Bender, L. and B. F. Vogel. 1941. Imaginary companions of children. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 11: 56-65.

These researchers present in some detail 14 cases of imaginary companions among non-psychotic children aged 6½

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to 10 years of age, on the Children's Ward of Bellevue Psychiatric Hospital (New York). They comment that these cases do not resemble each other but that each is as different as the personality of the child in question. They consider that the creation of companions in fantasy is a positive and helpful mechanism used during a time of need but immediately given up when the need no longer exists. They add that "this fantasy represents the child's normal effort to compensate for a weak and inadequate reality to round out his incomplete life experiences and to help create a more integrated personality to deal with the conflicts of his individual life" (p. 64).

Benson, R. M. and D. B. Pryor. 1973. When friends fall out: Developmental interference with the functions of some imaginary companions. American Psychoanalytic Association Journal 21: 457-473.

The authors raise the question of why two children suddenly abandoned their imaginary companions and replaced them with other companions of the same sort. The first child, Lynn, who was oldest in a family of three girls, invented her companion, "Nosey," between her 36th and 40th month when her mother was pregnant with the third child. "Nosey" was a male dog about five or six feet tall who always wore skirts. He was Lynn's constant companion for about a year but was suddenly abandoned when Lynn's grand-

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father asked her to have "Nosey" close a garage door while he at the same time closed the door with a remote-control device. After abandoning "Nosey," Lynn made a stuffed dog the object of her attention and affection.

Simon's imaginary companion, an extraterrestrial creature named "Ronzar," communicated telepathically with him from about age seven to fourteen. A psychiatrist suggested that "Ronzar" was only imaginary and that Simon needed him to relate to real people. After about a month of treatment, Simon suddenly announced that "Ronzar" had been killed in a meterorite shower. Simon soon invented a new companion, "Courco," also extraterrestrial, but a female who loved and took care of Simon as would a mother.

The authors point out that an imaginary companion can play any of several roles in normal development: as auxiliary to the superego, as scapegoat, to prolong feelings of omnipotence, as the impersonation of ego ideals, and as soother for feelings of loneliness. In regard to prolonging feelings of omnipotence, the imaginary companion functions as a narcissistic self-object--something which the child can control, but which also reflects approval of the child. Reference is made to Kohut's theory (p. 465) which holds that narcissism develops through stages of successive self-objects necessary to the maintenance of a cohesive self. At different stages the self-object may

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take the form of a transitional object, an imaginary companion, the latent peer group, adolescent gang, adult fantasy, and adult work.

Imaginary companions fulfilled the role of self-object for both Lynn and Simon. In Lynn's case it served the purpose of protecting her self-esteem which was being threatened by her age-appropriate phallic conflicts. Simon's imaginary companions served the loving caretaking functions of an idealized mother after his real mother was killed in a car accident. Both children suddenly abandoned their imaginary companions when adults took the companions out of the imaginary realm, and thus out of the children's control, by giving them existences in the real world of real objects and real people. The authors conclude that the developmental purpose of each child's first companion was not fulfilled before its departure, therefore, a second companion was invented to fill the void.

Breckenridge, M. E. and E. L. Vincent. 1965. Child development. 5th ed. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co.

"Preschool children deprived of satisfying companionship with other children of their own age group are likely to substitute for this a child or children who live in the imagination. Even in nursery schools, however, ...imaginary companions are common, several studies showing as high as one-third of such children having imaginary

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companions (p. 301). The researchers note that children of both sexes have them, and that extroverted children as well as "keenly intelligent" children have imaginary companions. They warn that adults should not add to the child's confusion in differentiating between real things and imagined things by treating imagined things as if they were real. They also state that the habit of projection of blame or negligence on someone or something else should not be encouraged. On the other hand, Breckenridge and Vincent note: "It is not wise to treat these imaginary companions as a ridiculous fancy or to punish children for them, since this only drives the companions under cover where they are likely to do real damage. They should always be kept in the open...in order to know how important to the child they are and how much of the child's time and attention they occupy" (pp. 301-302).

Brittain, H. L. 1907. A study in imagination. Pedagogical Seminary 14: 137-206, esp. 166, 170.

The subjects of this study were 19 boys and 21 girls, ranging in age from 13-20. All were from sibling families All undertook a series of tests in eight areas. Of these, the "tests of interests and preferences by means of questions addressed to the subjects individually" (p. 165) included the following series of questions: "Did you ever play with an imaginary companion? If so, at what age?

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Can you remember anything about these imaginary companions" (p. 166)? Brittain found that "five of the boys and six of the girls remembered having imaginary companions ... . The results as to age are unsatisfactory" (p. 170). One of the boys remembered having the same companion for several years, while another imagined a different one for each day. Brittain reports that "there seems to be a general correspondence between the results of these questions and of the story test, in that on the whole those who have had imaginary companions have been above the average in the imaginative quality of their stories" (p. 170). However, he notes "the most highly imaginative...does not remember having had an imaginary companion" (p. 170).

Burlingham, D. 1945. The fantasy of having a twin. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 1: 205-210.

Burlingham refers to the fantasy of having a twin, which is occasionally "built up in the latency period as the result of disappointment by the parents in the oedipus situation, in the child's search for a partner who will give him all the attention, love and companionship he desires and who will provide an escape from loneliness and solitude" (p. 205).

Burnham, W. H. 1892. Individual differences in the imagination of children. Pedagogical Seminary 2:

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204-225, esp. 212.

Burnham says: "The imaginative child often seems to live half his life in a world of poetry and make-believe. Such imaginative children not only have imaginary playmates and personate animals and men...but they almost reconstruct ideally the world in which they live. Beasts, birds, and their food and furniture talk with them... . They have play-brothers and sisters, and dear friends with whom they talk... . Much of this imagining centers about their own personalities, and consists in ideals for the future" (pp. 212-213).

Burnham, W. H. 1891. The observation of children at the Worcester Normal School. Pedagogical Seminary 1: 219-224.

In this paper, Burnham relates several essays written by students at the Worcester (Mass.) Normal School who made direct observations of children as a part of their psychology course work. Of interest is an essay on "Children's Make-Believes," which reports the "Fairyland" created by two children, eight and four years old, who populated this world with many imaginary people. "These people were very distinct... . It is interesting to know that a large part of these people were taken from their reading" (p. 222). Several elaborate and imaginative names were chosen for these playmates.

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Church, J. and L. J. Stone. 1968. Childhood and adolescence, 2nd ed. New York: Random House.

"It is during the preschool years, especially at ages four and five, that imaginary companions most often appear. (We use the term...to include not only imaginary playmates, animal or huma, but also imaginary realms, identities, and playthings,...)" (p. 294). In this respect, they note that Ames and Learned indicate that some 20 percent of children may have imaginary companions of one sort or another, although their own investigations among female college students, suggest that the incidence may go as high as 50 percent. Church and Stone state that "most imaginary companions seem to have vanished by age ten, although it is not unheard of for adults to have imaginary companions..." (p. 295). They further state that: "Imaginary companions are often experienced with all the vividness and solidity of real material objects, and children's families may find themselves making extravagant adjustments to the invisible [to them] visitor, taking care not to kick him or sit on him, and setting a place for him at table. Imaginary companions are sometimes born of a special need in a child's life for a friend, a scapegoat, an extra conscience, a model, or an escape from either a stressful or a too dull reality" (p. 295). Church and Stone relate an account of an imaginary friend,

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Wrinkel, whose behavior expressed the resentments and frustrations of a well-behaved hard-of-hearing girl who was afraid to acknowledge her handicap and therefore could not ask people to speak louder. However, sometimes, say the authors, imaginary companions are "distinctly unwelcome, ...and seem to be the incarnation of some deep-rooted dread or guilt. For instance, while in some children a companion who acts as a conscience may be gently reproachful, in others such a companion can castigate the child into a frenzy of terror. On the other hand, imaginary companions need not serve any apparent motivation or embody a special problem. They simply appear on the scene, do what they do, and depart..." (p. 296).

Cooley, C. H. 1922. Human nature and the social order. New York: Scribner's Sons.

Cooley says: "When left to themselves children continue the joys of sociability by means of an imaginary playmate... . It is not an occasional practice, but, rather, a necessary form of thought, flowing from a life in which personal communication is the chief interest and social feeling the stream in which...most other feelings float" (p. 88). Cooley goes on to say that "after a child learns to talk and the social world in all its wonder and provocation opens on his mind, it floods his imagination so that all his thoughts are conversations. He is never

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alone. Sometimes the inaudible interlocutor is recognizable as the image of a tangible playmate, sometimes he appears to be purely imaginary... . The main point to note here is that these conversations are not occasional and temporary effusions of the imagination, but are the naive expression of a socialization of the mind that is to be permanent and to underlie all later thinking" (p. 89).

Crow, L. D. and A. Crow. 1962. Child development and adjustment. New York: The Macmillan Co.

"The child talks to and about this companion. He often endows the imaginary child or animal with many virtues which are absent in his real associates. It has been a common belief that it is the lonely child who is most likely to create an imaginary companion for himself. This is not altogether true. A bright child is more likely than a slow child to engage in this form of make-believe, in spite of the fact that he may have same-age associates with whom he plays freely. It is a different kind of relationship, however. The child's imaginary companion is his own; there need not be any separation between the two; the child received an emotional satisfaction from this association with a kind of alter ego... . Adults are often bothered by a child's imaginary companion. They may believe that its 'existence' is a sign of something wrong with the child... . Perhaps the best approach

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...is to accept the imaginary companion and talk about it seriously with the child, with the assurance that, with increasing maturity and involvement in many real activities, this form of make-believe...gradually will be forgotten" (p. 216). The authors also warn that the adult must not overplay the existence of the companion, or ridicule or punish the child for imagining him, as "This adult attitude may cause the young person to become even more involved, using his relationship with the other as a means of comfort in an unpleasant experience" (p. 216).

Fraiberg, S. H. 1959. The magic years. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Selma Fraiberg describes the imaginary companion called "Laughing Tiger," of Jannie, aged 2 years, 8 months It appeared when Jannie had been very frightened by animals who could bite. Her capacity to use imagination and fantasy and further development in other areas enabled her to master her conflicts and anxiety. By means of fantasy Jannie changed the ferocious beast into a friendly tiger, who showed his teeth not in anger but in laughing. This laughing tiger was afraid of children, particularly of his mistress. It obeyed her absolutely. This allowed Jannie's ego to operate freely, without having to resort to the mechanisms of avoidance and phobic symptoms. Fraiberg further states: "If we watch closely, we will

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see how the imaginary companions and enemies fade away at about the same time that the fear dissolves..." (pp. 19-20). In the young child, the imaginary companion seems to represent a prestage or precursor of externalizing onto a real subject. This process is probably favored by the very young child's belief in magic, omnipotence, and his animistic conception of the world. Fraiberg describes this use of the imaginary companion very vividly. She says that the child "acquires a number of companions, imaginary ones, who personify his Vices like characters in a morality play. (The Virtues he keeps to himself. Charity, Good Works, Truth, Altruism, all dwell in harmony within him.) Hate, Selfishness, Uncleanliness, Envy and a host of other evils are cast out like devils and forced to obtain other hosts... . When Daddy's pipes are broken, no one is more indignant than the 2-year-old son who is under suspicion. 'Gerald, (imaginary companion) did you break daddy's pipes?' he demands to know" (p. 141). As Fraiberg points out, although the child knows that Gerald is an invention of his, he achieves a number of gains in this way. First, he tries to avoid criticism from the parents for his misdeeds and unacceptable impulses. Second, he can maintain his self-love. Third, though he cannot yet control his impulses, he addresses the imaginary companion as a naughty boy is addressed by his parents. He shows in

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this roundabout way the emergence of a self-critical attitude, which eventually will enable him to control his impulses.

Gesell, A. and F. L. Ilg. 1946. The child from five to ten. New York: Harper Brothers.

Gesell and Ilg say that growth processes determine in a broad way what and when a child will fear, and that they thus determine the what and when of his imaginary companions, among other things. Later, in speaking of play, they note: "Even in the play of phantasy, the child projects his private mental images in a practical spirit. He manipulates them in order to organize his concepts of reality, and not to deepen his self-illusion. Even his imaginary companions are amazingly serviceable devices, and so he uses them pragmatically,--until he is old enough to dispense with them" (p. 365).

Green, G. H. 1922. Psychoanalysis in the classroom. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Green discusses imaginary companions together with day-dreams and finds that the fantasy disappears when the child is at school. He believes that the imaginary companion phenomenon to be part of an unsatisfied instinct of gregariousness that is fulfilled by the friendships established at school. He feels that the "imaginary companion indicates a desire for self-assertion and

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display" (p. 11).

Griffiths, R. 1934. Imagination in early childhood. London: Paul Kegan.

Griffiths implies that the presence of imaginary playmates is at the same time a symptom of childhood problems and a means of making satisfactory adjustments to these problems. After making a study of 5-year-old children, 30 Londoners and 20 Australians, she writes: "Phantasy supplies an outlet for emotions, and has a value for the individual of a compensatory nature, affording a channel for the flow of energy where contact with reality is obstructed, and is therefore difficult or unpleasant... . Imagination is, in fact, the child's method not so much of avoiding the problems presented by environment, but of overcoming these difficulties in a piecemeal and indirect fashion, returning again and again in imagination to the problem, and gradually developing a socialized attitude which finally finds expression at the level of overt action and adapted behavior" (pp. 353-354).

Hall, G. S. and others. 1907. Aspects of Child Life and Education, edited by T. L. Smith. Boston: Ginn and Company.

Smith as quoted in Hall says that the imaginary companion shows "the impulse of a lonely child to find an ideal world with the sympathy and companionship which was

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lacking in the outward life" (p. 66-67).

Hammerman, S. 1965. Conceptions of superego development. Journal of the American Psychiatric Association 13: 320-355.

Hammerman describes the phenomenon of children who "consult" their imaginary companions, who in turn instruct them to control their behavior in general or certain impulses in particular. "Obedience and self-control, however, are not yet the same as self-criticism derived from moral judgment... . It seems reasonable that initially the developing superego organization works only under the actual supervision of external objects. In the well-known imaginary companions of children, we note the projection of prestages of the superego. Even though imaginary, the need for an actual external object is still great" (p. 327).

Harriman, P. L. 1937. Some imaginary companions of older subjects. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 7: 368-370.

Harriman believes that about one-third of all children between the ages of three and nine have imaginary companions. He feels that they exemplify the creative impulse and that formal education may repress the tendency. According to him, the imaginary companion is an illustration of wishful thinking compensatory for a real or fancied

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deprivation of completely satisfying human companions. He cites several cases where imaginary companions persisted through adolescence into adult life.

Harvey, N. A. 1919. Imaginary playmates and other mental phenomena of children. Ypsilanti, Mich.: State Normal College.

Harvey states that children have playmates "which are wholly imaginary, but which are as vivid and real to them as living playmates would be. These playmates are not merely vivid ideas, or imaginings, but actual visual and auditory projections. They can be seen and heard as vividly as if they were living children...although the child recognized that they differ..." (p. 124). Harvey goes so far as to state that "no stupid child ever had an imaginary companion," in relating the type of child who experiences the imaginary companion (p. 124).

Hurlock, E. B. 1972. Child development. 5th ed. St. Louis: McGraw-Hill.

Hurlock discusses imaginary companions in general, their prevalence, and an evaluation of their role. She defines such a companion as "a person, an animal, or a thing which the child creates in fantasy to play the role of a companion... . If a child is timid or has had unpleasant early social experiences, he may prefer an imaginary playmate to a real one... . Most imaginary

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companions are people--mainly children of the child's own sex and age. They have names chosen by the child because he likes them, and physical and personality characteristics the child likes--often those he himself would like to have. Imaginary companions can and will do anything the child wants them to . . . The child does not always tell others about him... . Indications are that imaginary companions are more common among girls than among boys, that they are more realistic to girls, and that they persist longer among girls... . Imaginary companions are more prevalent among children of superior intelligence than among those of average intelligence... . Children who have a frictional relationship with their siblings and parents are far more likely to have imaginary companions than those whose family relationships are harmonious... . No one personality type predisposes children to have imaginary companions... . An imaginary companion is by no means a satisfactory solution to the lonely child problem (p. 329)...it does not help him make good personal or social adjustments" (p. 330). Hurlock goes on to cite several ways in which having an imaginary companion affects the child's personal and social adjustment, and seems to feel that the "damaging effects of having an imaginary companion will probably be temporary" (p. 330) if the child has a strong motivation to play with real children

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and if parents and other adults can give him help and guidance in playing in socially acceptable ways.

Hurlock, E. B. and M. Burstein. 1932. The imaginary playmate: A questionnaire study. Journal of Genetic Psychology 41: 380-392.

A 20-question questionnaire was answered by 701 high school and college students, 393 women and 308 men. The median age of the respondents was between 18-19 years. In the study, Hurlock and Burstein attempted to discover the prevalence of the phenomenon of imaginary companions, facts concerning the playmates, and the backgrounds of the children who report having had imaginary playmates. Their findings showed that 31 percent of the women and 23 percent of the men distinctly remembered having had an imaginary playmate. They also found that the creation of the imaginary companion seemed to occur more often among girls than among boys. However, according to this investigation the background of the child who has had an imaginary companion does not differ materially from that of the child who has not had these friends. The age at which the imaginary companion made its first appearance was considerably older than previous literature had suggested--between five and seven in girls, after ten in boys. In general, "the companion was very much treasured by the child," (p. 388) and was not likely to have been shared or

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discussed. Girls, found Hurlock and Burstein, were more apt to attach names to their imaginary companions than were boys, although the last appearance of the companion occurred much later among the boys. It appeared that there was no definite tendency for the child to create a companion of the same age or sex, although the researchers found that the child did not like to have companions younger than himself. Hurlock and Burstein provide a brief review of the literature in the study.

Ilg, F., J. Learned, A. Lockwood, and L. Ames. 1949. The three-and-a-half-year old. Journal of Genetic Psychology 75: 21-31.

In discussing the outstanding personality traits of the 3½ year-old, the researchers note the child's intense imagination. Because of this, say Ilg et al., it is at this age which is the high point for imaginary companions. They continue: "The amount of this play varies from child to child. Some have only one such companion...while one child may...have several imaginary animal companions, and several different human companions and may also play...the role of an animal and/or of another person..." (p. 16).

Jersild, A. 1968. Child psychology. 6th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Jersild notes that the imaginary companion is "an especially interesting form of imagery in childhood," and

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is likely to occur sometime between the ages of three and ten (p. 392). He states that "the difficulty of defining and describing this phenomenon is increased by the fact that it typically occurs during a period when children are not very articulate or precise in expressing what goes on in their minds" (p. 392). Nevertheless, "the label imaginary companion is commonly applied to an imagined creature...or thing that is unusually vivid...; it is quite stable in its characteristics...; it appears for varying lengths of time during childhood and then 'disappears,' in the sense that it loses its vitality, although it may remain as a memory" (p. 392). Jersild describes some of the varied characteristics of imaginary playmates, suggesting that "one way of visualizing some imaginary companions is to regard the child who maintains them as a host and the companions as a viable and more or less tractable guest, with an independent reality of their own. The imagined characters are more likely to be persons than animals... (p. 392). Imaginary companions are (to their hosts) far more 'real' than the characters in a typical daydream, but children vary in the degree to which they regard their companions as solid substances" (p. 393). Jersild suggests that imaginary companions serve a variety of the child's needs, including companionship, self-aggrandizement, collaboration in practice, and offering

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release for forbidden impulses. Jersild discussed in some length the coming and going of imaginary companions, noting though, that "their disappearance seems usually to be as unaccountable as their coming" (p. 394). He supports the literature indicating that imaginary companions appear in children with a wide range of personality traits. And, he feels that the literature showing girls having imaginary companions more often than boys may simply reflect "a cultural rather than a genuine developmental difference" (p. 396). In fact, he states that boys have as much need for make-believe outlets as girls, but that boys are not so openly encouraged to reveal their fantasies. Jersild is of the opinion that "imaginary playmates...are likely to be prophetic of the child's later way of life" (p. 397).

Jersild, A. T., F. V. Markey, and C. L. Jersild. 1933. Children's fears, dreams, wishes, daydreams, likes, dislikes, pleasant and unpleasant memories. Child Development Monographs, No. 12: 103-107.

Jersild-Markey-Jersild, in their study of 143 children who reported imaginary companions, found that 79 percent of these were either human beings, story characters or, in five cases, elves and fairies. The remaining 21 percent were anthropomorphized animals, dolls and special objects. While some children described their imaginary

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companions as endowed with a peculiar apparent reality and marked vividness, the majority described characters which were less permanent and vivid, and which apparently could be revived or changed entirely at the caprice of the child. Some children mentioned characters who were shared by other actual playmates. These imagined characters often appeared to be somewhat troublesome creatures. A greater number of girls were able to give definite descriptions of imagined playmates and more frequently had make-believe companions of the opposite sex than did boys. Children able to describe definite make-believe playmates had a higher IQ than those who did not.

Jersild, A. T., C. W. Telford and J. M. Sawrey. 1975. Child psychology. 7th ed. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Jersild points out that the exact proportion of children having imaginary play companions is difficult to determine because children may not reveal their companions and because some children mention fleeting or intermittent imagined characters which may or may not qualify as imaginary play companions. In response to the literature showing a relationship between incidence of imaginary play companions and a child's position in the family, Jersild says that such factors "may be conducive to the appearance of imaginary companions but such companionships may occur

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regardless of a child's birth-order or his age in relation to other siblings" (p. 382).

Kirkpatrick, E. A. 1929. Fundamentals of child study. New York: Macmillan.

Kirkpatrick believes that not only do a few lonely and highly imaginative children have imaginary companions, but that nearly all children have them in some form for a greater or lesser period of time and with greater or lesser intensity. Sometimes the imaginary companion is an ideal self, sometimes a scapegoat, and at other times is not the self at all but a distinct personality (p. 138-139, 261).

Langford, L. M. 1960. Guidance of the young child. New York: The Macmillan Co.

Langford states that "children who do not have siblings or companions near their own ages are more likely to create imaginary playmates" (p. 236). From the standpoint of child guidance, "the important facts are: (1) since so many children of preschool age have imaginary companions, the practice should be considered completely normal, (2) by the time children reach elementary school age, they usually discard their imaginary friends, although sometimes they may reappear when children are lonely, and (3) children who appear to be perfectly well-adjusted are just as likely to have these make-believe

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playmates as timid, shy, or lonely children" (p. 236-237).

Manosevitz, M., N. M. Prentice and F. Wilson. 1973. Individual and family correlates of imaginary companions in preschool children. Developmental Psychology 8: 72-79.

Factors associated with the presence or absence of imaginary companions in 222 preschool children were investigated using a self-administered questionnaire completed by their parents. Data on family structure, play activities, and personality characteristics of the children were presented. A small percentage of the 63 children with imaginary companions and of those without imaginary companions (17.5 percent and 14.5 percent respectively) came from disrupted nuclear families. It did not appear that nuclear family disruption was a factor in contributing to the presence of imaginary companions. Analysis of data concerning frequency of only children, other household members, number, age and sex of playmates, number of hours spent with playmates, and number of pets in the household revealed no significant differences between those children having and not having an imaginary companion. "Quiet" play was engaged in by 18 percent of the children with imaginary companions and by 34 percent of the children without imaginary companions. Home play was self-initiated by 97 percent of the children who had

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imaginary companions and by 86 percent of children without imaginary companions.

Data on the characteristics of the imaginary companions showed that females had significantly more imaginary companions than males, that males were more likely to have a male imaginary companion, and that females only showed a slight tendency to have same-sex companions. Imaginary companions appeared in a majority of cases (61 percent) at a time when the children had no siblings. In 89 percent of the cases the imaginary companion was a person; in 59 percent of the cases the imaginary companion was male. Approximately 57 percent of the children had only one imaginary companion, and 23 percent had two imaginary companions. About half of the imaginary companions had common names. Most (93 percent) of the children preferred not to interact with their imaginary companion when other children came to play.

The study indicates that reducing loneliness is one of the multiple functions served by imaginary companions. It partially alleviates the loneliness of the child who has no siblings and generally lives in an adult-oriented social setting during a crucial period of childhood socialization and language development.

Munroe, J. P. 1894. Notes, Pedagogical Seminary 3: 182-184.

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In relating a case of self-projection in Katharine, age 3, Munroe states: "The imaginary companion appears to play a double role, that of playmate, and also a sort of self-projection or idealization of the child who created him. It represents, I think, the free will of the child aroused by the mother's admonition" (p. 182).

Murphy, L. B., et al. 1962. The widening world of children. New York: Basic Books.

This example shows that an imaginary companion appears in situations of special stress or of a traumatic character. Murphy describes the stress situation during which Sam, 3 years and 3 months, created his imaginary companion "Woody." When at the doctor's office for removal of finger stitches, Sam was forcibly taken away from his mother, and, says Murphy, "as an outgrowth of this separation situation a little elf named 'Woody' appeared in Sam's fantasy... . Woody turned up in many different situations and served many different purposes--sometimes a companion, sometimes a helper, sometimes a scapegoat... . The creation of such a satisfying externalized image to stay with him at the time his mother was forced to leave suggests both the importance of the strong support from mother, and the strength in his own struggle to maintain the feeling of support during her absence. Later he said to his mother one day, 'You know Mommy, Woody was really

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you'" (p. 124-125). Some time later when Sam entered nursery school, Woody would once in a while show up. Says Murphy of this: "He used his mother as an anchor to familiarity, for help, as a playmate, and as a love-object during the early period of getting acquainted in the new situation. His imaginary companion 'Woody'...also helped him" (p. 66).

Nagera, H. 1969. The imaginary companion. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 24: 165-196.

In his recent review of the phenomenon of the imaginary companion, Nagera observes that it plays a relatively small role in the analysis of children and is often not recovered in the analysis of adults. He says: "Perhaps the answer lies (in the case of the very young child) in the fact that what is important is not the content of the fantasy associated with the imaginary companion but the developmental purpose it is designed to fulfill. In this sense it has to be considered part of a developmental process and that is not the type of thing that is recovered by the lifting of the infantile amnesia. Furthermore, what cannot be recovered has to be reconstructed, and there are obvious difficulties in reconstructing the early existence of an imaginary companion. Another possible reason is that in the analyses of adults we do not pay as much attention to this phenomenon as we

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should" (footnote 2, p. 166). Nagera observes that imaginary companions are seen most frequently in children between 2½-3 and 9½-10 years, with the majority found in the younger age range. He explains the discrepancy between these recent findings and those of Hurlock and Burstein who found that "one-third of the group of people studied fixed the age of first appearance of the imaginary playmate at the stage between 7-9 years of age" (p. 385). Nagera believes that Hurlock and Burstein were not aware of the fact that infantile amnesia usually covers the earlier years, and that even if a person remembers the imaginary companion, he will tend to place it outside the period covered by infantile amnesia. He also notes in his review of the literature, that there are no uniform criteria used to define an imaginary companion, and that a variety of fantasy manifestations in children are included by some authors and excluded by others. He continues: "Although the significance of the imaginary companion is usually determined by a variety of factors, it seems to play a special role in the development of the child at the age of 2½-3 years" (p. 174). For this reason he singles out this group from the older, latency group in which "the phenomenon serves different functions" (p. 174). Nagera devotes many pages to the discussion of numerous case studies, each revealing a different function of the imag-

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inary companion involved. He supplements this material with comprehensive comparisons to the many other earlier studies in this area. He believes that the imaginary companion phenomenon "is a special type of fantasy that has all the characteristics of daydreams. Like ordinary daydreams, the imaginary companion fantasy is an attempt at wish fulfillment of one sort or another, is ruled by the pleasure principle, can ignore the reality principle, and need not be reality adapted, yet the fantasying person remains fully aware of the unreality of the fantasis that are being indulged in. In other words, reality testing remains unimpaired" (p. 194). Nevertheless, he continues, there are some significant features which are not necessarily characteristic of other forms of fantasy; notably the type and quality of the wishes involved, the seeming occupation of a physical space in the actual world of the child, and the quick return to reality and the object world after the initial withdrawal. Says Nagera: "Having found a new solution, the child brings his imaginary companion back into his real life and tries to have it integrated with and accepted by his object world" (p. 195). He concludes by quoting from Selma Fraiberg (1959):

> ...we must not confuse the neurotic uses of imagination with the healthy, and the child who employs his imagination and the people of

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his imagination to solve his problems is a child who is working for his own mental health. He can maintain his human ties and his good contact with reality while he maintains his imaginary world. Moreover, it can be demonstrated that the child's contact with the real world is strengthened by his periodic excursions into fantasy. It becomes easier to tolerate the frustrations of the real world and to accede to the demands of reality if one can restore himself at intervals in a world where the deepest wishes can achieve imaginary gratification. (p. 22f)

Nice, M. M. 1919. A child's imagination. Pedagogical Seminary 26: 173-201, esp. 176-179.

Nice gives a detailed early report of the course of the imaginative life of an individual child, following its development from about age three to age nine. This case is interesting as an illustration of the close sequential relationship between imaginary play, imaginary playmates, and imaginary stories. Nice notes that this child's creative moods were at times apparently stopped by an increase in the interest of real life, although at other times they became less and less absorbing even though no special change in environment was responsible.

Norsworthy, N. and M. Whitley. 1923. The psychology of

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childhood. New York: The Macmillan Co.

The authors write: "Images of children tend to be more vivid, more intense than those of adults. This opinion is based on the fact that it is sometimes difficult to get little children to distinguish between memory images and images of the imagination. In some children the confusion goes further. They cannot distinguish between percepts and images" (p. 159). The creation of imaginary companions is a result of this confusion. "The presence in a child's life of imaginary companions is very much more than has been supposed" (p. 163). They note: "Very few children retain these after eight or nine years of age, as they gradually fade away under the influence of more vital companionship with other children. ...in general the tendency to indulge in the playfellows is harmless" (p. 164).

Piaget, J. 1962. Play, dreams and imitation in childhood. New York: Norton.

"In the story of the "aseau" there is maximal transposition, but each attribute of the "aseau" is imitated from the real world, only the completed picture being imaginary" (p. 130). The child reproduces or continues his present life far more than pre-exercising future activities. "Just as practice play reproduces through functional assimilation each new acquisition of the child,

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so "imaginative" play reproduces what he has lived through, but by means of symbolic representation. In both cases the reproduction is primarily self assertion for the pleasure of exercising his powers and recapturing fleeting experience" (p. 131). The imaginary companions "provide a sympathetic audience or a mirror for the ego. ... acquire some of the moral authority of the parents, ... The character "Aseau" (obs. 83) who goes so far as to scold, ...recalls the examples given by Wulf, Ferenczi Freud of what they call "infantile totemism" or inver of animals which dispense justice" (p. 131).

"At 3;11 (20) she invented a creature which she called the "aseau," and which she deliberately distinguished from "oiseau" (bird) which she pronounced correctly at this age. ..."It's a kind of dog"... "like a bird." Its form varied from day to day: it had wings, legs, it was "huge," it had long hair..." (p. 129-130). For about two months "aseau" was helpful "in all that she learned or desired, gave her moral encouragement in obeying orders, and conscled her when she was unhappy. Then it disappeared" (p. 130). "Aseau was replaced by a girl who was a dwarf... , then by a negress to whom she gave the name "Cadile." Cadile turned into "Marécage," a symbolic companion, ..." (p. 130).

"After 3;7 her pillow "Ali" became the essential

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character who was the center of everything... . At 4; 2 (22) Ali appeared again, as "Ali-Baudi, a shepherd at Pive" (L's imaginary village)" (p. 129).

Rowen, B. 1973. The children we see. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Rowen believes that perhaps the anxiety produced in the socialization process of the 3-year-old is dealt with "effectively through the invention of an imaginary playmate... . If conflict between impulse and conscience has produced anxiety, which might lead to fear, an imaginary monster is easier to deal with than the conflict itself. This is a creative way of coping with a problem" (p. 149). She continues: "these seem to be evident even when 3-year-olds play together in groups. They can be heard conversing with imaginary playmates while actual playmates are sitting right next to them... . Soliloquies serve the purpose of helping to clarify ideas and perfecting speech patterns" (p. 152).

Schaefer, C. E. 1969. Imaginary companions and creative adolescents. Developmental Psychology 1: 747-749.

The relationship between reported incidence of childhood imaginary companions and adolescent creativity was investigated in this study. The sample included 800 high school students, subdivided according to sex, creativity, and specialty. The relationship between childhood imag-

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inary companions and adolescent creativity received partial support in this study. Creative adolescents in the literary field reported this significantly more often' than their matched controls. The incidence of imaginary companions across all groups was 12 ~~or~~ 31 percent. Schaefer concludes: "Perhaps the main implication of this study is that parents and educators should not become unduly concerned when children report the existence of imaginary companions since this phenomenon appears to favor brighter children and, more specifically, those bright children who have leanings toward literary creativity" (p. 748).

Smart, M. S. and R. C. Smart. 1972. Children: Development and relationships. 2nd ed. New York: The Macmillan Co.

In their summary paragraph on imaginary playmates, the authors conclude by noting a study of college students who had had imaginary companions in childhood. It showed them to have tendencies toward higher-than-average grades and toward cooperation, friendships and the experiencing of strong feelings and emotions (Duckworth, L. H. "The relationship of childhood imaginary playmates to some factors of creativity among college freshmen." Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1962). The authors note that imaginary playmates "can be human or

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animal, fleeting or long-enduring, single or multiple, ideals or scapegoats," (p. 287) and add that "Studies report a quarter to a third of children as having imaginary companions" (p. 287).

Smith, T. L. 1904. The psychology of daydreams. American Journal of Psychology 15: 465-488.

Smith stresses the fact that imaginary companions appear very early, usually at the time when the child is beginning to remember things, and usually disappear when the child goes to school and becomes absorbed in outside things or other playmates. The author believes that it is the lonely and imaginative child who creates companions as his playmates. Smith suggests that "closely akin to the story form of day-dreams is the imaginary conversation which is sometimes carried on with actual friends and acquaintances, sometimes with strangers casually seen, or with children in history or books, or in some cases with purely imaginary characters" (p. 475).

Sperling, O. E. 1954. An imaginary playmate representing a pre-stage of the super-ego. The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child 9: 252-258.

Sperling here discussed the case of Rudy, age three, and his imaginary companion 'Rudyman'. He believes the companion to be an indirect form of identification with Rudy's father, and notes that because all aspects of this

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imaginary companion were masculine, it demonstrates that a boy can have a male superego, even though Sperling says it is the mother, mostly, who gives commands and implants values. In imaginary playmates, he says, are found narcissistic exaggerations typical of children in the late anal stage. He continues: "In the normal development of the child, imaginary playmates have the function of a training in controlled illusions" (p. 257). Sperling concludes: "The phenomenon of Rudyman demonstrates how the ego-ideal formation is used as an ego defense. By creating the illusion of Rudyman, Rudy preserves the pride in his omnipotence, while at the same time yielding to the demands of the outside world. This prestage of his superego...made it possible for him to bear disapproval and ridicule without losing his self-esteem and without becoming dependent on other people's opinions... . In this form the superego and the forerunners of the superego provided the stability of character and the illusion of freedom, which are so essential in mental health" (p. 258).

Svendsen, M. 1934. Children's imaginary companions. Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry 32: 985-999.

Svendsen, in a study of 40 cases, observed that vivid and sustained imaginary companions were encountered three times as often among girls as boys. This phenomenon was

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not limited to children of superior intelligence, though apparently more prevalent among them. Personality difficulties of a mild nature in 35 of the 40 cases were found, with timidity leading. Seven of the children, however, were described as leaders. At the time of creation of the companions, 55 percent were "only" children. Activities shared with imaginary companions were usually those which were highly charged emotionally by virtue of being novel and pleasurable, or humiliating and consequently painful. The play tended to reflect parental attitudes, particularly disciplinary attitudes and the child's reactions to them. There was clear indication that the experiences were accompanied by visual imagery. She found an incidence of 13.4 percent among children observed.

Swee, H. P. 1910. Her little girl. Pedagogical Seminary 17: 104-110.

Swett reports the imaginary companion, "Little Girl" of one child, whom she refers to as C. This case emphasizes the "moral" aspect frequently observed in connection with imaginary companions, in that "Little Girl" punished C severely whenever C was bad.

Tanner, A. E. 1904. The child. Chicago: Rand, McNally and Co.

Tanner wrote: "Loneliness, distance, and mystery

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are great stimulants to a child's fancy. Probably most children have fictitious characters with whom they play at times, but the imaginary playmate reaches its fullest development in the child who plays alone... (p. 126). It is frequently the case that the tendency to create such companions is hereditary" (p. 127).

Terman, L. M. 1926. Genetic studies of genius. Vol. 1. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press.

Terman notes that many gifted children have had imaginary playmates or imaginary countries, although comparative data for control children are not available. He also observes that there is some indication that they occur more frequently in cases where the child has no real playmate (p. 435-439).

Vostrovsky, C. 1895. A study of imaginary companions. Education 15: 393-398.

In 1895, Vostrovsky was the first to suggest that general temperamental differences, other than the possession of a marked amount of imagination, may be responsible for the appearance of imaginary companions. She also suggests reasons for these phenomena: "Of the 46 papers (reviewed) 40 describe people and but five animals, and one both animals and people. Children of the same sex seem to be preferred... (p. 395). Turning to what concerns more nearly the child having the companions, we find

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a child of a nervous temperament, who is thrown largely on his own resources, most susceptible to them. Three things play a prominent part in causing these playmates: desire for self aggrandizement, desire for company, sympathy and desire to help others" (p. 396). The material used by Vostrovsky was derived from 27 persons who had imaginary playmates, ten who had observed children playing with these created beings, and five who had heard about such children. She points out that most children attach specific names to these companions, and found that the first appearance of the playmate varied from age 1 to 13.

Wickes, F. G. 1927. The inner world of childhood. New York: D. Appleton and Co.

Wickes cites in detail many cases of imaginary companions. He finds that the imaginary playmate is used to integrate "warring" elements, eliminate the undesireable, furnish a pattern, compensate for a failure and as an excuse for retreat (pp. 162-217).

Wingfield, R. C. 1948. Bernreuter personality ratings of college students who recall having had imaginary playmates during childhood. Journal of Child Psychiatry 1: 190-194.

This study seems to indicate that, according to the Bernreuter scales (personality inventory), college women

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who recall having had imaginary childhood playmates have the following personality traits: "they are less neurotic; they lack self-sufficiency, that is, they dislike solitude and seek encouragement and advice to a greater degree than the average college woman; they are less introverted; in face-to-face situations they are more dominant; they possess self-confidence to a greater degree; and they are more sociable than the average college woman" (p. 193).

The theme of imaginary companions in general literature occurs frequently. The following is a partial list from general literature:

Albee, E. 1962. Who's afraid of Virginia Wolf. New York: Atheneum.

Allen, H. 1933. Anthony Adverse. New York: Farrar Rinehart.

Chase, M. 1969. Harvey. In C. Barnes, ed. Fifty best plays of the American theatre. Vol. III. New York: Crown.

deMusset, A. 1866. Oeuvres Complets. Vol. 1. Paris: Charpentier,

Dunsay, Lord, 1926. Charwoman's Shadow. London: Putman.

Hunt, U. 1914. Una Mary. New York: Scribner's.

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Lamb, C. 1926. The Essays of Elia. London: Dent.

Milne, A. 1954. Winnie-the-Pooh, and When We Were Very Young. New York: Dutton.

Poe, E. 1881. The Works of... Vol. 4. New York: Middleton.

Stevenson, R. 1923. The Complete Poems of... New York: Scribners.

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IMAGINARY PLAY COMPANIONS:

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2: 204-225, esp. 212.

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Hammerman, S. 1965. Conceptions of superego development. Journal of the American Psychiatric Association 13: 320-355.

Harriman, P. L. 1937. Some imaginary companions of

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older subjects. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 7: 368-370.

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